Remembering Bill Neale, MMR®

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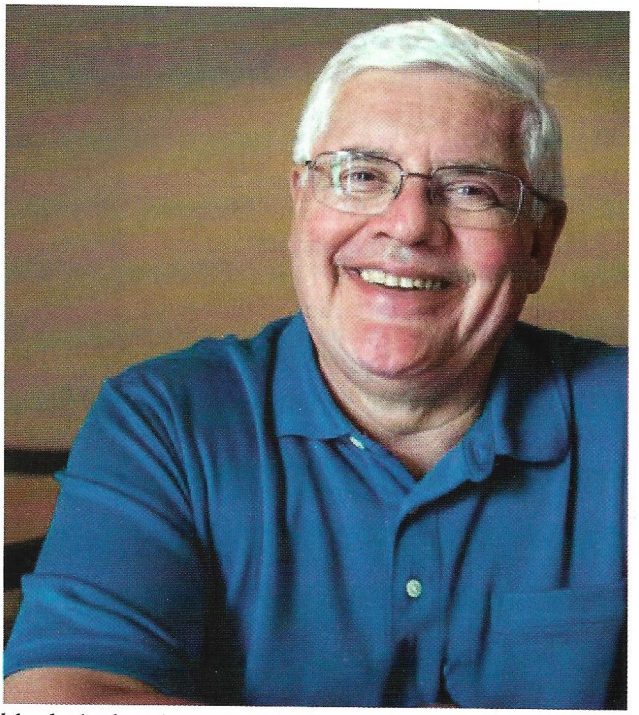

On December 28, 2023, the model railroad community lost a great modeler and, more importantly, a friend to many of us when Bill Neale passed away after a brief illness. Bill was 74.

Like many of us, Bill started his model railroad interest at a young age. One of the first things he did while still a teenager was to become a life member of the NMRA. Bill went to Purdue University, obtaining a degree in computer science, with a major in math and a minor in history. While at Purdue, he was active in the Purdue Model Railroad Club, where he met Tony Koester, Bill Darnaby, Ron Burkhardt, and several other model railroaders who became lifelong friends. Upon graduation, Bill married his love, Terry, whom he met in high school in Anderson, Indiana.

After graduation, Bill worked for a while for the Electro-Motive Division of General Motors in LaGrange, Illinois. Later, he worked for EDS, Hewlett Packard, and General Motors in different positions, including Account Manager and Program Manager. While living in Chicago, Bill became a founding member of the Midwest Railroad Modelers Club, also known as the "Batavia Club." Bill often said he learned how to hand-lay track and scratchbuild turnouts through the abundant practice he got at the Batavia Club — practice he put to good use his whole life on his layout and in helping others.

After a move or two, Bill, Terry, and their two daughters settled in Farmington Hills, Michigan, a suburb of Detroit. He and Terry found a wonderful home with adequate space for a model railroad. That's the way Bill put it. It included an exceptional backyard that supported Terry's gardening interests and their love of bird-watching. Here is where Bill created his layout depicting the "Panhandle" portion of the Pennsylvania Railroad, including Weirton, West Virginia, and Steubenville, Ohio. The layout is set in 1939 and is all steam. The layout is partially double-decked and has a large amount of staging trackage to support the operations Bill so loved. Bill could stage as many as 26 trains, and operating sessions were always fun. During COVID-19, Bill took advantage of the time and completed his signal system and the related towers necessary to his Pennsy layout. Bill's layout was essentially complete.

For the past 20-plus years, Bill was a member of the Midnight Pocatello Yardmasters, a round-robin group in Southeast Michigan. Bill completed his Master Model Railroader® (#480) during those years, making him one of eight in the group to achieve that level. Bill hosted more than his fair share of operating sessions. His sessions, employing about 12 people, were sought after because they were very prototypical and interesting. Bill regularly hosted operators who came from around the country.

In addition to his love of model railroading, Bill was a well-known and acknowledged expert on the Pennsylvania Railroad. He was a member and regular article contributor to the Pennsylvania Railroad Technical and Historical Society.

Bill was an outstanding layout designer. He had an article in *Model Railroad Planning* every year for several years. Bill helped many people design or modify their layouts. He had a gift for understanding what people wanted, working to develop a plan that would work to provide them satisfaction for years to come.

Bill was a member of several Special Interest Groups — OPSIG (operations), LDSIG (layout design), and the Steel SIG. He was a member of Div. 6 of the North Central Region of the NMRA, where he held various offices over the years. Bill had also been the Central Division Director of the NMRA. In many ways, Bill lived up to the pledge that is part of the MMR® application to use his skills and energy to benefit the hobby and the modelers he met.

While all of us will miss the operating sessions and working together on layouts, Bill's wonderful attitude is what we will miss most. He was always positive, helpful, and a joy to be with.

PRR No. 7504 at Hanlin on Bill's layout. — ***Craig Wilson photo***